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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: OBASANJO INSIDER OUTLINES CRITERIA FOR
PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

REF: ABUJA 3031

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Lawal Batagarawa, former Minister of State for Defense and currently Special Presidential Advisor, in an early November conversation with the Consul General discussed President Obasanjo's plans for presidential succession. Batagarawa detailed the criteria for selecting a candidate and discussed the pluses and minuses of several contenders. Batagarawa forecasted the next President will be a northerner willing to share the limelight with Obasanjo, who, as the next Chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) after he leaves the Presidency, will brandish tremendous power. The next President must also be acceptable to most of the established Northern leaders and clerics. Batagarawa opined that since none of the current contenders favorable to Obasanjo meet all these criteria, Obasanjo and his advisors must not only be wise in selecting their presidential candidate, they must also show sagacity by early on selecting the team that will join this putative successor in the next government. End summary.

¶2. (C) Lawal Batagarawa, former Minister of State for Defense and currently Special Presidential Advisor, in an early November conversation with the Consul General discussed President Obasanjo's plans for presidential succession. Although reluctant, President Obasanjo has reconciled himself to leaving office, according to Batagarawa. However, Obasanjo has recast the People's Democratic Party (PDP) constitution to make himself a very powerful PDP National Chairperson after leaving the presidency. Obasanjo will use this position to influence the next President, Batagarawa indicated. In Batagarawa's words, Obasanjo's successor will have to be content with the notion of Obasanjo hovering over him as the "Co-President".

¶3. (C) Predicting the presidency would go to a northern candidate, Batagarawa raised three factors he thought cardinal to the selection. First, the next President will need to have the maturity to share top billing with Obasanjo. This is where Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi has stubbed his toe, he observed. Makarfi is capable but has a megalomaniacal streak. As Governor he has refused to let anyone else share the spotlight in Kaduna. Obasanjo is apprehensive that if the national klieg lights begin to shine, Makarfi's aggrandizing tendencies might get the better of him.

¶4. (C) Second, Batagarawa also stated the next President must have good relations with traditional Northern leaders, particularly the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero, and the Ulema, the assemblage of prominent northern Muslim clerics. Third, Batagarawa noted the next President must have the

confidence of the military establishment.

15. (C) Obasanjo was opposed to selecting a candidate from the old Northern guard. Instead, Obasanjo wanted to select from the younger generation of political leaders, yet none filled all three requirements. Batagarawa predicted the selection would be a complicated process but admitted there was not much time to undertake what would usually be an elaborate tapestry of time-consuming negotiations. Since no one candidate fulfilled all the requirements, Obasanjo and his advisors would not only have to choose the President but also carefully identify people to fill key senior government positions in order to satisfy the three requirements for the North's acceptance and the additional requirements of the other zones. For example, the next President cannot afford to have a cipher as Defense Minister nor attempt to be his own Petroleum Minister as Obasanjo did. The next President must fill these two important slots with capable people from strategically important areas.

16. (C) Batagarawa discussed the pluses and minuses of the major contenders for the presidency. As stated before, Obasanjo and his advisors believe Makarfi is too power-conscious and unwilling to share the limelight. Katsina State Governor Usman Yar'adua is inscrutable, Obasanjo cannot determine if the Governor is a deep thinker or vacuous, Batagarawa deadpanned. Former Foreign Minister Sule Lamido is one of Obasanjo's favorites, but Batagarawa predicted Lamido would more likely run as Governor of Jigawa State, as Obasanjo wants to put Lamido in Jigawa to help stabilize the PDP in the North. Nassarawa State Governor Abdulai Adamu is one of Obasanjo's close favorites. However, as Batagarawa accurately noted, Adamu's popularity begins and ends with Obasanjo. Batagarawa mentioned himself as a dark

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horse but Batagarawa admitted he was unsure whether Obasanjo has mentioned him out of generosity for his years of service or really considered him a serious prospect.

17. (C) In Batagarawa's estimation, the frontrunner is Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister Mallam Nasiru El-Rufai. But El-Rufai has outraged many well-placed people with his adamant running of the FCT and his purported urging of his "junkyard dog", Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairman Nuhu Ribadu, to attempt to discredit almost all the governors and other major presidential contenders.

18. (C) After this brief survey of possible Northern candidates, Batagarawa stated that he would arrange a meeting of Obasanjo's short list of presidential candidates to establish a gentleman's agreement between them. The purpose would be to agree to support the candidate whom Obasanjo chooses, with the tacit acknowledgement the other contenders would gain prominent places in the next administration.

19. (C) Comment: Batagarawa is a thoughtful and level-headed politician, yet depending on with whom you talk, you hear vastly different interpretations of President Obasanjo's inclinations. Either Obasanjo is a master dissembler or his coterie of aides have been afflicted with selective hearing--they only hear what they want. Most likely it is a bit of both. Obasanjo seems to be allowing his advisors to presume their own preferences, thus keeping as many factions loyal to him as possible while keeping his options open. Obasanjo will probably continue to wait till the last moment before making a final decision on whom to back for the ultimate prize. End comment.

BROWNE